

## פֶּשֶׁר pšr

I. Etymology, Occurrences, Loans, Translations; II. Egyptian Aramaic and Murabbaʿat; III. Daniel; IV. Book of Giants

Lit.: ThWAT VI 810-816 (*H.-J. Fabry / U. Dahmen*) with references to earlier literature.

*M. Görg*, Josef, ein Magier oder Seher? (BN 103, 2000, 5-8); – *H. Lozachmeur*, La collection Clairmon-Ganneau. Ostraca, épigraphes sur jarre, étiquettes de bois (= CC-G; Paris, 2006); – *G.J. Brooke*, Peshar and Midrash in Qumran Literature: Issues for Lexicography (RevQ 24, 2009, 79–95; – *M. Nissinen*, Pesharim as Divination: Qumran Exegesis, Omen Interpretation and Literary Prophecy (K. De Troyer/A. Lange [Hg.], Prophecy after the Prophets? CBET 52, Leuven, 2009, 43-60; – *U. Gabbay*, Akkadian Commentaries from Ancient Mesopotamia and Their Relation to Early Hebrew Exegesis (DSD 19, 2012, 267-312).

I. The Aramaic root *pšr* is attested in Aramaic texts from Egypt (the verb *pšr* and the noun *pšrn*) and Murabbaʿat, in Daniel and the Book of Giants, and in many forms of later Aramaic. Its etymology and meaning have been connected with Akkadian *pašāru* (CAD 12.236-45), Biblical Hebrew *pātar* and *pittārōn* (Gen 40-41), and Second Temple Hebrew *pāšar* (as a verb only certain in 1QpHab 2,8, but see also Rabbinic Hebrew) and *pēšær* (Eccl 8,1, CD 4,14; texts from Qumran). The common assumption (with the recent exception of Görg and GK<sup>18</sup>) of an original Semitic root \**ptr* “loosen” is problematic: it requires explaining the *ptr* forms in Gen 40-41 as due to Aramaic influence, and, vice versa, the Aramaic *pšr* forms in Daniel and the Book of Giants as a loan from either late Babylonian or Hebrew. Moreover, attestations of the root *pšr* in Egyptian Aramaic (see II) with meanings that can be related to *pašāru*, suggest that Akkadian, Aramaic, and Second Temple Hebrew, have original Semitic \**pšr* in common. In Arabic *fassara*, “explain” and the related masdar *tafsir* may be a loan from Aramaic or Syriac (A. Rippen, Tafsir, Encyclopedia of Islam<sup>2</sup>, Leiden, 1999). It is possible that *ptr* in Gen 40-41 is originally an Egyptian loan (Görg), though semantically largely overlapping with the technical meaning of *pšr* in relation to dreams (the Hebrew noun *pætar* in CD 13,8, *bptrjh*, but see 4Q267 9 iv 5 *bp]trjhm*, and 4Q298 3-4ii 9) is also used differently than *pēšær*). Regardless of a possibly originally different root, they become to be dealt with as synonyms. For example, Targum Onqelos (but not Neofiti) and Peshitta render Hebrew *ptr* with *pšr*.

The basic meaning of \**pšr* “loosen,” “release,” can be determined from Akkadian, but was apparently also known to the LXX translator of Eccl 8,1 who rendered *pēšær dābār* by λύσιν ῥήματος. Many derived meanings are attested in Akkadian, e.g., “release someone from a commitment” or “pay.” In Second Temple Hebrew and Aramaic the root is most often used with respect to the explanation of the meaning of dreams (in Aramaic texts) and prophecies (Hebrew texts from Qumran). The LXX of Daniel renders the noun *pēšær* generally with κρίσις or σύγκρισις, adopting Greek words for the explanation of dreams. The semantic and historical relationship between the Akkadian, Aramaic, and Hebrew technical use of the words is disputed and unclear. While the use of *pēšær* in Daniel indicates familiarity with the Akkadian noun *pišru*, it is not clear whether the specific use in Qumran Hebrew was mediated through Aramaic, or also in part depending on Babylonian. Regardless, one cannot simply assume that the cultural background of the term in one

of those languages also should be supplied in texts in another language. It is also not certain whether the meaning of the verb *pšr* in Daniel and the Qumran texts is related to a meaning of Akkadian *pašāru*, or, more likely, derived from that of the noun *pšr*.

II. In some Egyptian Aramaic ostraca, instructions to come or to send are followed by a concluding phrase *wl' pšrn*, taken by TADAE to mean “without fail.” Cf. TADAE D7.20,2; TADAE D7.37,10 (in the last line of the ostrakon); CC-G 146,cv6 (last line); CC-G 217,4 (last line; read *pšrn* in stead of the editor's *pšrj*, and restore preceding *wl'*); CC-G X7,cv2. The phrase may emphasize that the instruction should be carried out per se (“without fail”), or in a time-sensitive fashion (“without delay”). It may also have a legal tone, indicating that the addressee receives no release from a commitment. The verb *pšr* may express the same meaning and emphasis as the noun. Two lines after *wl' pšrn*, TADAE D7.20,4 recapitulates *'l tpšr lm'th mħr*, “do not fail to come tomorrow”; one may read in TADAE D7.27,14 (last line) *'p 'l tpšr*, “morover, do not fail”; in CC-G 146,cc4 probably read *wl' ]tpšrj lm[* “do not fail to,” rather than *]twšrj lm[* (the same text ends with *wl' pšrn*). TADAE also deciphers the verb in the literary text 23.1.5a,12 *whn ltpšr*, “and if you will not fail.” In TADAE C3.13,50 (formerly AP 63,14) *hpšr* (palaeographically better than *hwšr* which TADAE prefers), the *aph'el* possibly means “to pay” as in later Aramaic (and cf. CAD 12 *pašāru* 6 “to sell, to release [in consideration of payment]”). The *'alef* in the reading *w'pšr* in the loan Muri8 6 (thus DJD 2.101-3; TDTJD 1.15 does not present a reading) is difficult, but a form of *pšr* is likely, in which case it refers to repayment. Only the last of those texts has a religious importance: the IOU document Muri8 promises to settle his debt in full, even in the Year of Release.

III. In scholarship, the meanings and use of the verb *p'šar* and the noun *pēšær* in Daniel have been compared to those of Akkadian *pašāru* and *pišru*. The verb is found only in Dan 5,12, where the Masoretic pointing describes Daniel as *m'paššar ħelmîn* (generally taken as “interpreter of dreams”) and 5,16 where he is said to be able to *pišrîn l'mipšar* (“unfold meanings”). Syntax suggests that in 5,12 the two *pael* participles in *m'paššar ħelmîn* and *m'šārē' qitrîn* (“looser of knots”) be read as *peal* infinitives: *mipšar* and *mišrē'*. The two phrases in 5,12 and 16, *mipšar ħelmîn* and *mipšar pišrîn* might relate to the same activity, but specify two aspects: Daniel is able to solve dreams by giving their meanings. The variant formulation could have a literary function: Daniel is renowned for solving dreams, but now is asked to give the meaning of a writing on the wall. Given the Babylonian setting of the story, the rare Akkadian collocation of *pašāru/puššuru* with *šuttu* (“dream”), understood to be “to recount” or “interpret dreams” (CAD 12.241-2), has been thought to be relevant (the one example in BAM 574 iv, 39 of *pašāru piširšu* is in a broken context in a medical incantation). However, in Akkadian, the principle meaning is the releasing or undoing of a dream, i.e., getting rid of its troubling consequences by magical or ritual means, rather than a verbal recounting or interpretation (Zgoll, AOAT 333, 383-396). In Dan 5, that meaning still might be at the background, inasmuch as Daniel is called to bring relief to the king's terror, and “loosing knots” may hint at breaking spells. Yet, the narrative, and the parallel phrase in 5,12 *'ah'wājat 'ħūdān* (“explaining riddles”), indicate verbal recounting. The connections between *pēšær* in Daniel (30x in the singular) and Akkadian *pišru* are stronger. In Daniel, the *pēšær* is directly connected to dreams (see the expressions *p'šar ħelmā'* and *ħelmā' u-pišrēh*), words or matters (*k'tābāh d'nāh u-pišrēh*; *p'šar mill'tā'*; *p'šar millajjā'*) which should be declared, made known, or told (the *pēšær* is mostly

the object of the verbs *ḥwj* (both *paēl* and *haphēl*), *jdʿ* (*haphēl*) or *ʾmr* (*paēl*). Twice the verbal enunciation of the *pēšær* is explicitly introduced by the phrase *dʿnāh pišrāʾ* (4,21) and *dʿnāh pʿšar millʿtāʾ* (5,26). In Akkadian, *pišru* is not used in relation to dreams, but mainly in Neo-Assyrian letters of scholars to kings on astronomical observations and their meaning. The typical format consists of a description of an astronomical observation, followed by *piširšu* (“its meaning”) or *anniu piširšu* (“this is its meaning”), and then a quotation from the omen literature which decodes its meaning with respect to future events. Occasionally, the quotation itself is cryptic, and needs further explanation, which can also be called *pišru* (Gabbay, 302). Formally, this corresponds in Daniel to the description of a dream or writing, followed twice by the formula *dʿnāh pišrāʾ/pʿšar*, and the decoding of its meaning—rather than an interpretation—with respect to the future, within the literary setting of Babylonian scholarship at the royal court. Those correspondences suggest that also in Daniel *pēšær* is “meaning,” which resides in the dream, rather than the verbal act of interpretation which unfolds the meaning. In Dan 2, “dream” and “meaning” together are described as a *rāz* (“mystery”) which God reveals. Because the “meaning” comes from God, it is *mʿhēman* (2,45 “trustworthy”) and *gʿzērat ʾillājāʾ* (4,21 “a decree of the Most High”). The comparison with the Babylonian texts also reveals the differences, which inform us of the theological stance of Daniel. The use of *pēšær* with respect to dreams, visions, and writing, rather than to astronomical phenomena, tallies with a belief that God reveals the future through dreams and writings (Dan 2,28-29). The fact that the “meaning” itself is also revealed, rather than accessible in scholarly writing, challenges divinatory scholarship.

#### IV. Book of Giants

The Qumran Aramaic fragments of the Book of Giants describes two dreams with apocalyptic content of the giants Hahyah and Ohyah. Hahyah is told to tell his dream to “the scribe of distinction” (*spr pršʾ*) Enoch, *wjpšr lnʾ ḥlmʾ* (4Q530 2 ii 14 “so that he could give the meaning of the dream to us”), and Mahaway is sent to Enoch in order that he should declare to him *p[š]r ḥlmjʾ* (2 ii 30 “the meaning of the dreams”). Mahaway tells Enoch that they want to know *pšrhwn* (4Q530 7 ii 10 “their meaning”; but do not read *pš[rʾ* in line 7) from him. While the figure of Enoch includes traits from Mesopotamian kings (Enmeduranki, Ziusudra) or sages, connected with divinatory arts, those are not directly related to the explanation of dreams. There may be a connection between Enoch’s status as a scribe of *pršʾ* and his ability to explain the meaning of dreams. The textual juxtaposition in 4Q530 2 ii 14 could reflect a general association between dream interpretation and specific scribal skills. It is, however, doubtful whether the epithet *spr pršʾ* semantically implies the ability of explaining dreams. Like Greek *κρίνω*, the verb *pršʾ*, “to separate, distinguish,” implies a broader range of sound judgment and explanation. It is not clear, however, whether, like Greek *κρίνω*, *pršʾ* also was used for explaining dreams. In 4Q203 8 13 the reading *wpšr šbwt[ʾ dʾ* (DJD 36.28 “and the interpretation of this matter”) may be taken as a variant of *pʿšar millʿtāʾ*, and refer back to the preceding description of destruction. Alternatively, given the reference to “loosing bonds” in the next line, *wpšr* might perhaps be a verb or noun with the basic meaning to “loosen” (perhaps followed by *šbw d[ʾj]*).